

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 14 August 2013

Present: Councillor M Hankey (in the Chair);
Councillors D Cassidy; S Carter; A J Cummings; J Daly; M James; S Nuttall; D O'Hanlon and T Tariq

Public in attendance: 11 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Also in attendance: Councillor Lewis – Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Culture
Councillor Connolly – Leader of the Council
Councillor J Smith - Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

Apologies for absence: Councillors M Bailey; L Fitzwalter and P Heneghan

OSC.260 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Connolly declared a personal interest as his partner is employed in Adult Care Services

OSC.261 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions asked from the public present at the meeting under this item.

OSC.262 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION - PLAN FOR CHANGE REVIEW OF LIBRARIES – PROPOSALS FOLLOWING CONSULTATION

The Chair, Councillor Hankey, reported that the main item of business before the Committee was as a result of a Call-in Notice. The Notice related to the Cabinet decision taken on 10 July 2013 to approve proposals in respect of Libraries across the Borough

The report for decision of the Cabinet Member for Leisure, Tourism and Culture had been submitted which outlined the next steps of the Library Review process and set out revised proposals following on from a report considered by Cabinet in April 2013. The April report, the Phase 2 Consultation report and the Equality Analysis Form were appended to the decision report.

The reasons for the Call-In of the decision were set out within the Notice as follows:

1. The results of the consultation were ignored.
2. There were insufficient financial figures provided in respect of alternative proposals.

The Chair, Councillor Hankey, and Members of the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member for Leisure Tourism and Culture and the following issues were raised:

- The Chair, Councillor Hankey, and Members of the Committee acknowledged and welcomed the fact that all Libraries in the Borough would remain open as a result of the proposals in the report. In response to a question relating to potential further changes, the Cabinet Member stated that no further changes were planned at the present time.
- With regard to the initial Plan for Change programme and the time taken to realise savings from the Library Service, the Executive Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods highlighted that as a statutory service, a process had been followed which had involved detailed consultations and the exploration of different procurement options. The Executive Director also referred to the changing budget position of the Council as a result of further cuts in grant funding and the impact this had on bringing the proposal forward.
- In response to a questions relating to the decision not to proceed with the development of Community Hubs, the Executive Director of Resources explained that, following detailed structural and technical surveys, the substantially higher than expected level of capital investment required had changed the risk profile and viability of the business case. This was further compounded by notification of a further 10% cut to the Council's budget as a result of the latest Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) in June.
- Councillor Daly expressed concerns that the report to Cabinet in April had asserted that the Community Hub Model could be supported without detailed structural surveys having been undertaken. The Executive Director of Resources explained the importance of not pre-empting the consultation process but highlighted that the report submitted in April did clearly set out that any final proposals would be subject to a viable business case being developed following technical and structural survey work.
- In response to points made by Councillors Carter and Cummings, the Cabinet Member agreed that the probability that there would be further substantial cuts to the Council's overall funding as result of the CSR, and changes to the business rates system, had contributed to the risk profile changing.
- The Cabinet Member acknowledged that it was regrettable that the development of Community Hubs could not be progressed at the moment but stressed that the Council were committed to examining the future viability of the development of this model through ongoing Asset Management Reviews. The Leader of the Council highlighted that Community Hubs did offer a means of providing services in a different way, making a better use of assets and providing accessible services for the future.
- In response to a question concerning job losses, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the number of job losses highlighted in the report to Cabinet in April had not changed as a result of the revised proposals. The Executive Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods explained that

20.25 full time equivalent posts would be lost from the service and reported that a number of employees had already expressed an interest in taking voluntary early retirement/severance.

- With regard to the impact of the job losses on the service the Cabinet Member and Executive Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods highlighted that this had to be looked at in light of changes to the way people use libraries, the increase in the use of electronic books and the introduction of self service technology. It was explained that a range of performance indicators are used to ensure the continued quality of the service.
- Councillor Hankey referred to the duty placed on Council's in relation to libraries as set out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Cabinet Member expressed confidence that the service would continue to provide a comprehensive and efficient service and explained that legal advice had been taken throughout the whole process.
- In response to questions from Councillor Daly and Councillor O'Hanlon concerning the reconfiguration of the Service, it was explained that this could not be meaningfully be drawn up until it was apparent which staff had requested voluntary early retirement/severance. It was explained that any requests would be looked at in light of the future staffing requirements of the service.
- In response to questions from Councillor O'Hanlon, the Executive Director of Communities and Neighbourhoods expressed confidence that thorough research had been undertaken with other authorities in relation to staffing levels and acknowledged that the exact cost of individual severance packages was subject to a number of variables, such as length of service and number of hours worked.
- Councillor O'Hanlon questioned the reasons behind the judgement that the development of community hubs did not offer value for money. The Executive Director of Resources explained that the scale of capital costs identified as a result of detailed survey work meant that a clear business case could not be made. The Executive Director further explained that Members had been advised, and accepted, that funding such a high level of unsupported capital expenditure from prudential borrowing risked breaking the Council's Golden Rules.
- During discussion of the procedural options available to the Committee in respect of the called in decision, Councillor O'Hanlon proposed that comments be submitted to Cabinet requesting further financial data and information supporting other potential options for the library service.

It was agreed:

That, having considered all the points raised in the Notice of Call-In, this Committee does not offer any comments to the Cabinet in respect of Minute CA.185, Plan For Change Review Of Libraries – Proposals Following Consultation.

(Note: Councillor O'Hanlon requested that it be recorded that he voted against the decision on the above item)

COUNCILLOR M HANKEY
Chair

(The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.25pm)